

Letter from Taizé

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THE UPCOMING MEETING IN PARIS

Discovering the Riches in People's Hearts

Paris and the surrounding region, known as the "Ile-de-France": the meeting to be held at the end of the year is already being prepared in a place where ten million people live together, not just French but from a great many different backgrounds.

During the spring, preparation meetings were held in the eight districts of the region, which each form a separate diocese, so that those preparing the meeting could get to know the diverse characteristics of the Church in that part of France.

At Longpont, in the diocese of Evry, those interested in helping with the meeting met one evening in a twelfth-

century Romanesque basilica to begin an "inner pilgrimage" with a time of prayer together. To welcome them, Marie-Françoise, a youth minister for the high schools of the town, summed up her experience during the previous European meeting in Paris in 1994: "The first time the brothers came to our parish eight years ago, we asked them: what should we do? They answered: begin by entrusting everything to God in prayer. 'OK, but more concretely?' And then we realized that there was only one possible answer: preparing a European meeting means first of all thinking about many people we are not acquainted with and who do not know us yet either. It means working hard. It also means getting to know incredibly generous people. You begin alone, and then as the autumn months go by people appear. Someone offers a box of rolls for breakfast, another offers to drive to the train station to pick up the participants during the five days of the meeting. A group helps you to prepare the times of prayer. A meeting like this turns a parish, and a neighborhood, upside-down. You come out of it filled with great happiness. What matters most is to trust, to form a team, to pray. We are still following the only advice

the brothers gave us eight years ago: we meet every Sunday evening for a time of prayer using the songs from Taizé."

A Parable of God's Kingdom

In each of the eight districts of the region, what is most striking is the diversity of people you meet, which is already a kind of parable of the Kingdom of God. Some young adults, at university or already in professional life, have decided to take an active part in the local preparation by joining the team created around one of the youth ministers. Yolaine, a math teacher at Arpajon, is part of the Evry team: "We are lucky to have a young district and diocese, where things are not rigid and where young people are really part of the pastoral activity. The meeting can be a integral part of our agenda in the diocesan youth council, which meets regularly with the bishop to witness to our vitality in this quickly growing region." In the northern part of the district, where many firms dealing with new technologies, a research area for



physics and chemistry, and the center for atomic studies are all concentrated, 60% of the population moves every ten years. The meeting offers the challenge to form ties with all these people who pass through. Groups of young Christians in professional life are one of the significant innovations of recent years in the life of the Church in this area. These groups are a good way of reflecting on the meaning of life in the business world, of Christian witness there, and to ask oneself how to create the conditions for a human and full life at work.

Other young people have a glowing memory of the last few meetings held in other countries, and so they do not want to miss the opportunity of returning the hospitality they received in Barcelona or Budapest. Many are doing all they can for participants to be welcomed in families. Some are already asking how they can contact families beyond the circle of those who are already known in the parish. Danielle, the diocesan delegate for relations with Judaism for the diocese of Saint Denis, said, "Welcoming people in our homes can be a very concrete way of re-establishing friendly relations with our Jewish neighbors. Paris is the second largest Jewish city in Europe after London, and there are ten synagogues in the town of Sarcelles alone, in the Val d'Oise northwest of Paris!"

Dialogue with Contemporary Society

There is a great richness in the French Church, a richness that the parishes want to show in the mornings during the meeting. Among the signs of hope are the different forms of dialogue with contemporary society that are being undertaken.

Dialogue through art is what may strike visitors to Paris in the first place, thanks to the newly built churches. The forms were constructed with great care and daring so they would fit in with the architecture of skyscrapers or with the residential districts whose buildings are made of glass. In the 15th arrondissement in Paris, when you look for the parish of Our Lady of the Ark of the Covenant, you are astonished to find a large cube mounted on twelve pillars, suspended between heaven and earth above a public garden, representing both the Ark of the Covenant and the heavenly Jerusalem of the Book of Revelation. The parish priest admits it took him a while to get used to his new church! The same effort can be seen in Evry, a new entirely planned city built from scratch in the

middle of fields in the 1960s, to integrate the new cathedral in the center of town. The Ile-de-France is the part of the country where most new churches are built, and even new cathedrals, two in ten years!

Dialogue through commitment. You are surprised to discover how vital the commitment of lay people has become for many local communities. In some dioceses, the lack of priests has made it necessary for a small group of lay people to take charge of a parish or a chaplaincy. In the diocese of Créteil, these "pastoral ministry teams" now play a very active role in the day-to-day life of the Church: organizing worship, welcoming people to the parish, giving religious instruction, celebrating funerals, etc.

Social action on behalf of those who suffer is also a beautiful sign of the presence of the church in the suburbs of Paris.

At Mantes-la-Ville, the computer skills of some young people are at the root of an original project to recreate links with other young people in a town characterized by social problems. Benoît, a young computer consultant who is involved in the project, explains, "The priest of the parish of Saint John the Baptist had computers installed in one of the rooms in the parish and turned it into a kind of little internet café where people could log on freely to the internet. In addition, young people involved in the parish decided along with others from Val Fourré, a difficult district of Mantes-la-Jolie, to record, produce, copy and distribute a CD of the parish Easter celebration to finance their trip to World Youth Day in Toronto, and this gave them the idea of broadcasting the songs on the internet for free. And to go further along the same lines, the idea arose of having a real radio station to prepare the European meeting, with programs, conversations and interviews. A technical trick made it possible to use a cell phone as a microphone to do interviews, by simply calling the number of the radio. They are getting ready to visit different parishes to cover the first stages of the preparation in the autumn." This is certainly an original way to motivate families to open their homes to participants!

Signs of Solidarity

At Ivry-sur-Seine, Christians have not forgotten the witness of Madeleine Delbrêl, a young woman who, in the 1930s, decided to live in one of the Communist suburbs to undertake a respectful dialogue with nonbelievers through a simple life in the service of

the unfortunate. A social worker, she discovered the harsh realities of life and the hope that grew out of the workers' movement. The Gospel can also be lived out in the working world. Close to the French worker-priests' movement, priests who worked in factories or firms while living together in small groups and helping out in local parishes, Madeleine Delbrêl was the inspiration for a new way of living a mission at the heart of dechristianized cities. "We, the people of the street, believe with all our hearts that this street, this world where God has placed us, is for us the place of our holiness." A normal, banal world, which knows almost nothing of God except for false images, but which is the place where solidarity enables people to experience the Good News in all its freshness.

Brotherly love is perhaps the expression that best sums up the many different activities which parishes are undertaking on behalf of the destitute: a group of young people who animate the Sunday Masses at Fleury-Mérogis, the largest prison for minors in Europe, a parish choir at Trappes including young people from a difficult neighborhood... After a European meeting the question often arises: "If I was able to offer a warm welcome to young foreigners whom I could not even understand, how much more could I welcome my next-door neighbors, who speak the same language I do?"

Myriam, from the parish of Saint Francis of Sales in the 17th arrondissement of Paris, took the question seriously: "What if I invited my neighbors in for a drink? A small group of us had the idea of organizing a 'building party' every year, gathering in the halls, glass in hand. Whereas today people travel a lot and go further and further away from home, most of the time we do not know the people who live under the same roof as we do. If we pass them in the hall, we say a quick hello. Opportunities to meet have to be created. How did we organize that party? A few days before, we put a poster at the entrance to the building and an invitation in each mailbox. On the evening itself, at about 7pm, we set up a table at the foot of the main stairway for whatever each person could bring—beverages, crackers and cakes, fruit... Some came with products from the region they come from. People

...were soon having very lively conversations. I found out that Marjorie, who lives on the sixth floor, studies literature at the Sorbonne like me. Most of the residents said they couldn't stay very long, but the conversations lasted till 9:30. When we said goodnight, we already had the idea of organizing a second meeting. That short time together enabled us to get to know one another, to create or renew bonds of neighborliness. Now when we meet we do not hesitate to share news, to ask a favor or to offer to do one. Edith, a Hungarian woman who lives in the building at present, was enthusiastic about the evening and intends to try the experience in her building in Szeged, the city in Hungary to which she plans to return. So why not you?"

Reconciliation

Dialogue through the heart. Attempting to sum up what Taizé means for him, Father Michael Dubost, the bishop of Evry, replies, "Reconciliation. That's the word that comes spontaneously to mind. That's what Taizé can help us to discover, and our local communities certainly need that." In each of the eight districts, contacts are multiplying to invite the Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, Lutheran and Baptist congregations to take part in the meeting. Some young French Orthodox are considering the idea of proposing a common liturgy during the meeting with the participation of the choirs of all the different Orthodox Churches represented. Perhaps the days in Paris will be an opportunity for some visitors to rediscover aspects of their own tradition: France is a land of immigrants, and everyone can find a bit of themselves in Paris. More than anything else, that is what this 25th stage of the "pilgrimage of trust on earth" wants to represent. The Church can become a place where we feel at home together, both in Paris and when we return to our own situations.

For practical information about the meeting and themes for the preparation, see the Letter from Taizé no. 3 or the Taizé website: www.taize.fr

Preparing in Other Countries

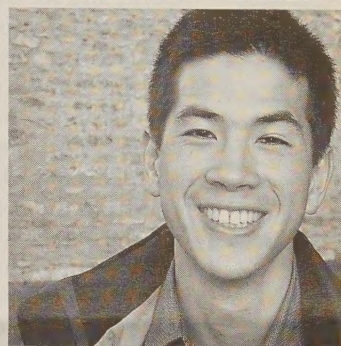
The preparation is an essential part of the meeting. In many countries, people are beginning to get to work. In April, two brothers of the community went to Krakow in Poland. A new parish, started about ten years ago, offered to welcome them. The church, modern in style, symbolized the ambition of that parish located in a rapidly growing

working-class neighborhood. Turned towards the future, circular in form, it wants to be wide-open, available to all and confident in the future. In the parish there is a "restaurant of the heart" run by parishioners, where poor people from the neighborhood can go to get a meal and feel welcome.

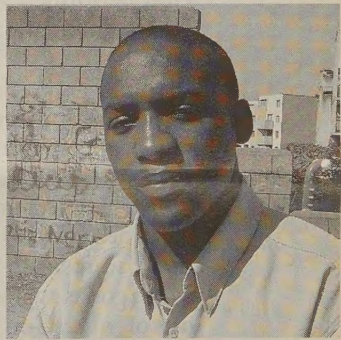
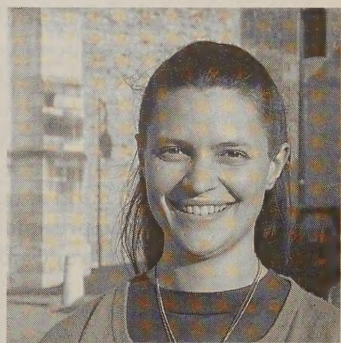
This visit was an opportunity to meet many groups of young people, particularly students, groups that are very active and that enjoy coming together regularly over a cup of tea to discuss, to practice songs for the Sunday Eucharist or to pray in silence in a crypt. For many, this meaning was a way of reflecting on what really matters, the meaning of a life given to Christ, how to understand a rapidly evolving society where traditional values are being called into question.

The time the two brothers spent in Poland was also for the purpose of leading a weekend that brought together over 250 young people from throughout the country for a time of prayer and sharing. They discussed different topics for an entire afternoon. This in-depth meeting satisfied them beyond their hopes. Their joy was quite perceptible, and became for many an encouragement to dare to give their lives. Some talked about their activity in a retreat house. Another group accomplished linguistic feats to translate the new songs from Taizé into Polish. Before ending this long day with a time of prayer together with the parishioners, a surprise gladdened the hearts of the participants—a student choir from Krakow enthusiastically sang its faith with gospel music. It was one of the moments when each person felt deeply the happiness of being together.

At the center of that meeting there was also a time of reflection together on the upcoming European meeting in Paris. Each person was aware of the need to be attentive to the preparation groups that would be responsible for organizing and explaining the meaning of the gathering in the French capital. How can we help those who go to Paris to be aware of what is at stake in this pilgrimage of trust, for them and for those who will welcome them? How can we not just focus on the beautiful buildings, but also discover the beauty in the hearts of the people? How can we offer a clear testimony of our faith in Christ to all those who are wounded by doubt and fear of the future? These are some of the crucial questions entrusted to the responsibility and the creativity of all these young people, united in a common desire to offer a sign of hope during the upcoming European meeting.



Young people from the Paris region are getting ready to welcome...



According to the Bible, God acts through events. "Come and see the marvels of God, awesome deeds for the children of Adam" (Psalm 66:5). He intervened to bring justice to the oppressed in Egypt. To help the humble of the earth, "he broke the lightning-flashes of the bow, shield and sword and war" (Psalm 76:4). He saved Jonah by sending a large fish, delivered Daniel from the lion's den, raised Jesus from the dead.

In the old days, God's hand was seen quite spontaneously in spectacular phenomena: storms (Psalm 29), a thick cloud or fire (Exodus 13:21-22), a hurricane shaking the mountains (Exodus 19). Today, those who think God can act in the world of our experience look for it primarily in people's hearts and consciences, leaving natural phenomena to the scientists. It's true that new scientific approaches are beginning to find explanations for human intelligence and emotions as well. It will no doubt always be possible to keep back portions of reality from science and reserve them for God. But can God, "for whom and through whom all things exist" (Hebrews 2:10), be relegated to a limited domain?

Something else makes it difficult for us to conceive of God as acting. If God intervened, would it not be to prevent catastrophes and violence? That is an age-old question. God's inactivity leads people to cry out in prayer: "Wake up, Lord! Why are you asleep?" (Psalm 44:23). It was said in the past that God performed wonders. Now he is "asleep." Another psalm says: "This is what wounds me: the right hand of the Most High has lost its strength" (Psalm 77:10). God's right hand is his activity, which has apparently ceased.

Disconcerted and hesitant, the psalmist still keeps remembering God's past actions about which he has heard: "I reflect on all that you did, I ponder all your great deeds" (v. 12). And finally words of admiration rise up again in him: "God, your ways are holy! What god is as great as our God?" (v. 13). The memory of what God did in the past, faithfully passed down from parents to children, is decisive so that each new generation in its turn can recognize God.

Summing up the trust of his people, Jesus said, "My Father is at work until now" (John 5:17). His "Gospel of the Kingdom" (Matthew 4:23) is that God has come and is at work. It is not possible, of course, to say that God is here or there (Luke 17:21). But God's presence and constant activity, which the Bible refers to as God's Reign or Kingdom, are among us and spread out to fill the entire universe (Psalm 103:19).

Who has never wished they were different? The prophet Samuel made this promise to Saul, the future king: "The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you (...) and you will be turned into another man" (1 Samuel 10:6). Jesus announced "power from on high" (Luke 24:49) and at Pentecost, his disciples were changed. Their timidity disappeared; they sang of God's marvelous deeds and the forgiveness offered by the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2).

But did they really change? Following the events of Pentecost, the authorities in Jerusalem wanted to know more about these men who were able to turn the whole city upside down. They quickly realized that the apostles were "uneducated laymen" (Acts 4:13). Peter and John were unable—and probably unwilling—to hide what they were. They remained Galilean fishermen with their way of acting, their accents, perhaps a certain clumsiness. They were changed while remaining the same.

The Holy Spirit, by nature invisible and imperceptible, is manifested by its results. The tree is known by the fruit it bears: oranges come from an orange-tree, apples from an apple-tree, and love, joy, peace and goodness from the Holy Spirit. The "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22) ripens during our lifetime; a believer "is like a tree planted alongside flowing water that bears fruit in season" (Psalm 1:3). The water does not change the apple-tree into an orange-tree, but causes both of them to bear fruit. The "flowing water" refers to God's presence that changes me into someone who is alive, but without replacing what I am. Without changing my identity, God makes my life-history fruitful.

God esteems and fosters our gifts. But the Spirit also breathes through the empty spaces and the holes of our personality. The Spirit can work with a little bit of faith, weak health, limited abilities. God's hesitancy in changing us is sometimes a bit disconcerting, especially when he does not even fix what seem to us to be serious defects.

The apostle Paul asked God to deliver him from "a thorn in his flesh." No one knows what kind of suffering he was referring to. But in spite of Paul's prayer, the situation did not change. Then he heard Christ tell him, "The gift of my love is enough for you." Those words would change Paul's life. And to express this change which involved no apparent change, he said, "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). He had an experience of the Holy Spirit, the "power from on high," that not only coexists with weakness and flaws, but comes to full flowering in us just as we are.

1 SUN Jesus said: If anyone wants to follow me, let them renounce themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

2 MON Lord, you look upon the humble. Though I live surrounded by trouble, you give me life.

3 TUE Be always joyful, pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances.

4 WED Do not repay one wrong with another. Seek peace and pursue it.

5 THU Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth. Give me an undivided heart that I may reverence you.

6 FRI Jesus said to a young person: You lack one thing. Go, sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

7 SAT Paul writes: Draw your strength from the grace which is in Christ Jesus.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

8 SUN Jesus said: When two or three meet in my name, I am there among them.

9 MON Jesus said: Whoever tries to save their life will lose it, but whoever risks their life for my sake will find it.

10 TUE May God fulfill every good purpose of yours by his power and complete all that you have been doing by faith.

11 WED May God enlighten the eyes of your heart so that you may see the hope to which he calls you.

12 THU Jesus said: Love one another just as I have loved you. By this, everyone will recognize you as my disciples.

13 FRI Who among you reveres the Lord? Who among you walks in darkness and sees no light? Trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon your God.

14 SAT James writes: Do not only listen to the Word, put it into practice.

15 SUN Peter asked Jesus, "How many times should I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "Not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

16 MON We can reassure our hearts before God, whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts and knows all things.

17 TUE Do not be sad or afflicted: God's joy is your strength.

18 WED Jesus said: Whoever listens to my words and puts them into practice is like someone who built their house on rock.

19 THU If you break unjust chains to let the oppressed go free, if you share your food with the hungry and shelter the homeless, then your light will break forth like the dawn and your wound will be quickly healed.

20 FRI Jesus said: Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

21 SAT St MATTHEW As he walked, Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me". And he got up and followed him.

22 SUN Turn to God who will forgive freely. For, thus says the Lord, my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.

23 MON Your God is with you. God will quiet you with his love and dance with joy for you.

24 TUE Jesus prayed for his disciples, saying: Father, may they all be one, just as you are in me and I am in you, so that they may also be in us and the world may believe that you sent me.

25 WED Paul writes: The mystery of Christ is that all peoples now share the same inheritance, being members of one body, and having received the same promise in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel.

26 THU All the believers held everything in common. They sold their goods and possessions and shared the proceeds according to the needs of each person.

27 FRI Isaiah said: On that day there shall be no more hurt or violence, for the land will be filled with the knowledge of God as the water covers the bottom of the sea.

28 SAT Jesus said: I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor who will stay with you for ever — the Spirit of truth.

29 SUN Being in every way like a human being, Christ Jesus was humble yet, and became obedient to death, death on a cross. Therefore God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names.

30 MON Jesus said: The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.

Jesus our peace, in your Gospel you assure us: I will send you the Holy Spirit, who will give you the gift of being in communion with God day after day.

Holy Spirit, in you we are led to discover this surprising reality: God creates in us neither fear nor anguish; all God can do is to love us.

6 SUN Ph 4:4-7 Do not let anything worry you, but in every situation, by prayer with thanksgiving, let God know your desires.

7 Mon Jn 12:47-50 Jesus said: I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.

8 Tue Jn 6:28-35 Jesus said: I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

9 Wed Jn 15:1-5 Jesus said: Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

10 Thu Lk 7:36-50 Jesus said to a woman, "Your sins are forgiven." Those who were present began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" But Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

11 Fri 1 P 4:7-11 Peter writes: Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over many a sin.

12 Sat Mt 12:14-21 Jesus fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah: My servant will not quarrel or cry out, he will not snuff out the smouldering wick. All the nations will put their hope in him.

13 SUN Is 25:6-9 The Lord has destroyed the veil of mourning that enfolded all peoples. He has swallowed up death forever.

14 Mon 1 Jn 4:7-11 This is love: not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent his Son for the forgiveness of our sins.

15 Tue Na 1:7-8 God is better than a fortress in time of trouble. He recognizes those who trust in him, even when the flood rushes on.

16 Wed Pr 23:15-19 Let your heart remain constant in the adoration of God; for there is a future and your hope will not come to nothing.

17 Thu 1 P 5:1-4 Watch over those who are entrusted to you, not simply as a duty, but willingly and with gladness of heart, according to God's will.

18 Fri Lk 10:1-9 St LUKE Jesus sent out his disciples saying: Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there and say, "The kingdom of God is very near you."

19 Sat Rm 8:28-30 Paul writes: In all things God works for the good of those who love him and who have been called according to his purpose.

20 SUN 1 Th 1:1-5 Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: our gospel came to you not only in words, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with great effect.

21 Mon Mt 6:25-34 Jesus said: Seek first God's kingdom and his justice, and all other things will be given you in addition.

22 Tue Jr 20:7-9 Jeremiah said: The word of the Lord has brought insult and derision upon me. And so I said to myself, "I shall not think about him, I shall no longer speak in his name." But there seemed to be a burning fire in my heart, which I could not contain.

23 Wed Rm 15:1-7,13 St. Paul writes: We should not try to please ourselves, but consider what is good for our neighbours and so build up community.

24 Thu 2 Co 13:11-13 Paul writes: Live in joyfulness. Encourage one another. Be of one mind and live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

25 Fri 2 Co 1:18-24 Paul explained his ministry, saying: We do not want to be masters of your faith, but fellow workers with you for your joy.

26 Sat 1 Jn 3:14-20 Let us not love just with words and in speech, but with actions and in truth.

27 SUN Mt 22:34-40 Jesus said: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is similar: Love your neighbour as yourself.

28 Mon Mt 5:14-16 Jesus said: You are the light of the world. Let your light shine in people's sight, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

29 Tue Is 43:1-4a Thus says God who created you: Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name, you are mine.

30 Wed Sl 27:30-28:7 Forgive your neighbour any wrongs. For if someone nurses anger against another, how can they then ask for healing from God?

31 Thu Jn 14:15-26 Before his Passion, Jesus said to his disciples: I shall ask the Father and he will give you another protector, the Holy Spirit, to be with you for ever.

"The Reign of God is at hand!" Jesus' message is summed up in those words. Isaiah had announced its future coming, but Jesus says more radically, "It is already here!" When he speaks these words, the times are not good: John the Baptist has just been thrown into prison. There is a lack of hope, politically as well as spiritually. In a world where violence and the law of the jungle seem to win out, where even with the best of intentions life together seems impossible, Jesus wants to make people attentive to a new way forward: God is here! God's Kingdom is hidden in the world like yeast in the flour (Matt 13:33). We can pray to "our Father who is there in secret" (Matt 6:6).

Christ is turned toward God from the beginning (see John 1:1). And he wants to lead us along that road. Far from being a flight from the world, this road allows us to be much more present to the world, to people's joys as well as their sufferings. Living a life turned toward God implies a twofold activity: Jesus shows goodness himself, by healing and forgiving, but he also brings to light signs of God's presence that he discovers in others, like the widow who gives all she has (Mark 12:44) or the Roman centurion who shows such trust that Jesus admires him (Luke 7:9), or the disciples who leave everything to follow him.

What is astonishing is Jesus' simplicity. And he invites us to have the same simplicity: "keeping alert" (Mark 13:37), "believing" in the presence of God's love for everyone, rooting our lives with perseverance in this love and discovering signs of it, especially in acts of charity and beauty. Through humble events, God speaks to everyone with infinite discretion. It is up to us to discern God's presence, discovering day by day in the events of our life a word from God.

And then we discover that we are supported. The Holy Spirit that was with Jesus throughout his life (Luke 1:35; 3:22; 4:14... 24:49) "makes us cross over to the newness of Christ" (Irenaeus of Lyon). A new vitality, a living hope, animates our life, when we dare to see God at work, even in difficult situations, creating life and communion.

- What signs of the presence of God's Reign are a support for me in my life today?

If the heart of the "parable of the father" (Luke 15) is the father's welcome of his son who comes home (v. 20-24), the climax of the parable is the father's reply to his elder son. We should be thankful to the older son for having merited that unparalleled response! If the parable had concluded with the unexpected welcome shown to the younger son, we could have thought that the father had not fully shown himself as he was. His reply to the older brother, however, makes it evident that that is what the father truly is like. That is his deepest being, his "all" that he wants to share with us, and he awaits our response.

The father does not get angry with his elder son. He does not argue with him, either. Instead, he speaks to him words full of affection. "My child." That is more affectionate than "my son." There is no criticism or accusation regarding the son's bitter reproaches. The father does not defend himself. On the contrary, the father does not waste any time evaluating his own behavior or that of his elder son, emphasizing instead the intimate, unique relationship he has with his son: "You are always with me." Their relationship has not changed. Whereas the son spoke in terms of "me" (v. 29), the father places the accent on "you."

This father has no desire to win a victory over anybody. The father simply believed that the elder brother, seeing the love he had for his younger brother, would realize that he is loved in the same way, and that he would then love in the same way. The father remains patient and kind, but at the same time he doesn't make any concessions. His "norm," his "law" is unchangeable. He says that they had to celebrate and rejoice. The elder son had said, "your son" (v. 30), that ne'er-do-well, but the father replies: "No, he's your brother. You can start anew the relationship you had with him." The older son had said, "But he lived with loose women!" "He was dead and came back to life," the father replied. "he was lost and now is found!" Once again the father repeats his song (see v. 24). It's like a refrain; he sings it over and over in his heart. The father is overflowing with joy and gratefulness. Nothing can take that gladness away from him, not even his elder son's bad mood.

- What is typical of the way in which the father rejoices, loves and shares?
- Why does the parable not tell us how the older son replied?
- How can I go towards those who have wounded me?

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Indonesia

Signs of Light

In the weeks after Easter this year, with the daily Bible readings from Acts telling of the constant visits the early Christians made to one another, confirming one another in the faith, one of the brothers was in Indonesia. He shares here some of the many signs of light and Resurrection the he was enabled to take part in.

In Solo, Esaol, who spent several months in Taizé, is now committed full-time in an NGO "Yayasan Bimbingan Kesejahteraan Socila". This "Social Welfare Guidance Foundation" was set up by three congregations in Surakarta. What emerged most clearly during a meeting with the staff was the real suffering that so many people have to face, especially at this time of economic crisis. There are, for example, hundreds of "street singers", young people and less young, who go around the streets singing, ac-

companying themselves on the guitar. They have nowhere to stay and are often moved on by the police. YKBS has set up a simple shelter where they can go, and organises "automotive training" that allows them to update their skills such as servicing, maintenance and overhauling two or four stroke engines, motorbike repainting, and so on. This is in the hope that they will be able to get proper jobs or else set up a workshop in their own area. Some of the staff members spend several days a week in the villages, helping people develop organic farming or learn appropriate farming methods. Through these activities, there is a constant effort to help people become aware of their rights, about which many are completely ignorant. Among these are some of the 5000 families who were displaced years ago to make way for the Kedung Ombo Dam project, who are still living in temporary accommodation and still waiting for proper compensation.

A visit to Purwodadi with the young pastor of the local church showed how

the two dimensions of inner life and human solidarity are being lived out there in the most practical ways. Members of the church community have set up a goat-rearing project that has enabled several families to become self-supporting to the point of being able to pay off the original loan to start the project. The same evening, a prayer in Gedung Gereja Lama brought together over 100 people not only from Solo but from Jogjakarta as well. For the very first time in that church, people came from churches of different denominations.

Some of the YKBS staff expressed very clearly how much the fact that they pray together in a meditative way enables them better to work together. Another hopeful meeting took place with over twenty Muslim students at Pondok Pesantren—Islamic boarding school—of Al Muayyad. The 1988 riots were particularly violent in Solo and awoke the desire among the students and their leader to work together with Christians. All of them are committed to very practical

ways of building harmony and inter-religious dialogue, they are true peace-makers. A visit to the Greek Orthodox Church sparked the project of having a prayer there that is open to everyone.

Other signs of hope were evident in **Bandung** and in **Jakarta**. Everywhere the letter *Love and Say It With Your Life* was the starting point for an exchange on the realities of daily life, and led naturally to a time of prayer together. At one meeting in the centre of Jakarta, the young people had to battle through the rush hour after work to come together in an oasis of silence. At Santa Ursula in Bumi Serpong Damai, a place has been arranged for regular contemplative prayer. This is a follow-up to a weekend held there in October 2000. In a similar way, there was an evening gathering in their chapel for the students of Sekolah Tinggi Teologi. For everybody involved, this was another opportunity to rediscover how, if we are called to love and say it with our lives, the source of that love, and faithfulness in our commitment to solidarity, is to be found in prayer.

Germany

Discovering the Meaning of Communion

"When we realize that God loves us, that God loves even the most forsaken human being, then our hearts open to others. We are made more aware of the dignity of the human person and we ask ourselves: how can we prepare ways of trust on earth? However powerless we may be, are we not called to communicate a mystery of hope to those around us by the lives we live?"

These lines from Brother Roger's Letter for 2002 were reflected on during the many meetings and prayer vigils held in the course of two weeks in the North of Germany, every evening in a different place. The cities were very varied: Berlin, Hamburg, Bremen, Hanover, Schwerin, Stralsund, but also small towns, villages, places in the middle of the countryside or on the Baltic coast.

The meetings were just as diverse as the places and the people. At the beginning they did not know each other very well, but during the times of prayer together the communion quickly became tangible. The churches were decorated well: a warm and welcoming atmosphere was created with candles, a few icons, carpets for those who could not sit on the floor. And those who were unfamiliar with the songs from Taizé quickly entered into the prayer, sometimes thanks to the presence of small choirs and musical instruments.

In **Markee**, Gut Neuhoof, *La Fazenda da hope* is a project for young people who have problems with drugs or other addictions. It is a real opportunity for

street children and other lost youth. Young Germans, Brazilians and volunteers from other European countries work together there with young addicts who are trying to get rid of their addiction. During the meeting and the prayer, a great closeness among all was evident. "The hope and the communion we can communicate by our lives" was one of the themes. One of the directors of Gut Neuhoof wrote, "We are trying to live as brothers and sisters, with all our differences and difficulties. The source of our strength is prayer and the Word of God."

In **Stralsund**, a few students from a neighboring town also came for the prayer vigil. The singing went on for a long time; candles bathed the prayer space in a warm light. Some people had already heard about Taizé during the Communist period in East Germany, and the songs had made them feel for a long time already that they were not alone in their faith. Others only found a road to trust in God after the political changes. One of the participants said it was the first time she had ever prayed. Meeting together and sharing in a context of such diversity represented an encouragement: people just beginning their faith-journey, young people recently baptized, students committed to tearing down barriers in society, elderly Christians who had kept their faith in God, Protestants, Catholics... For all those who took part, it was a confirmation to keep going forward on the road of trust. Listening to the different experiences, all could find the encouragement to offer something of their own life to others.

In the center of **Hamburg**, the large church of Sankt Petri was packed for the "night of light." The prayer had been prepared by a group made up of people who pray regularly in different Protestant, Free Church and Catholic parishes. In this way they had an opportunity to get to know each other better.

Many young adults have gone to **Berlin** in the past few years to study or work. It is not easy to enter into a new environment, to find one's place in such a hectic city. The evening of prayer in the Protestant Segenskirche in Prenzlauer Berg took place on the very same day as the terrible tragedy at the high school in Erfurt. During the time of silence and the prayer intentions, everyone was thinking especially about the victims and their families. Someone had just come from Erfurt and told how the whole city was still reeling from the shock. In the midst of the sorrow and stupefaction, there was also gratefulness for this time of prayer together. When words are no longer enough, such occasions take on their true importance. The weekly prayer has become a home for many, a place where they feel welcome in the midst of an anonymous metropolis.

In **Schwerin**, some remembered the time of prayer with Brother Roger that took place there before the change of governments. In those days it was difficult for many to attend that prayer. Some were being watched, and you could never know whether there would be consequences. Since the change, more and more young and not-so-young people from Schwerin and the surrounding region have been able to go to Taizé. For some it was something they had dreamed of for years without ever imagining it could come true, for others a first contact with faith. All want to continue together something linked to their day-to-day life in a parish. They meet regularly for a time of prayer. That Saturday evening, they all gathered in the Lutheran cathedral. For the young Catholics of the sector, it was the concluding prayer of a day they had spent together. At the end, the flame of the paschal candle was passed to all the participants, a sign that Christ brings light into our nights, that he never leaves us.

What remains from all these visits is a great hope. Everywhere people are setting out to open roads toward trust, sometimes in a hidden way. These meetings and prayers are an encouragement: visiting one another, gathering in the same place, walking together, sharing one's experiences is a way of discovering the meaning of communion. It helps people realize they are not alone. And the circle widens; through them hope becomes tangible for others. There are many people walking together on the same road.

Letter from Taizé

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